

In Jamaica, another Bustamante pupil takes over

By CLYDE SANGER

NOBODY COULD have had a better grounding in the problems that face Jamaica and its 1,900,000 people than Hugh Lawson Shearer, the new Prime Minister and former Minister of External Affairs.

As Donald Sangster lay critically ill in a Montreal hospital with a brain hemorrhage yesterday, the Jamaican Cabinet was meeting in Kingston to endorse the choice for his successor already made by the ruling Jamaica Labor Party.

Has close ties

A handsome and athletic-looking 43, Mr. Shearer was born near the north coast port of Falmouth, close to the sugar and banana areas. Not far inland in Trelawny parish is the bauxite country; so he grew up, a scholarship boy going through St. Simon's College, close to the background of what are now the island's two main industries.

He moved into the centre of politics and the trade union world at the age of 18, when he joined the staff of the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union and the editorial staff of *The Daily Worker*.

Within six years he was a busy member of several industrial boards, including the Sugar Welfare Board. He was on numerous joint industrial councils, from banana plantations and cane farming to the printing trade. It was not long before he became Island Supervisor and vice-president of the BITU, second only to Sir Alexander Bustamante himself.

He had seven years in the Lower House from 1955, and sat for Western Kingston, the problem slum area of the capital. In 1962 he moved to the Senate to become leader of Government business in the Upper House, with a Cabinet seat as Minister without Portfolio. So he has the advantage of experience in both Houses, as well as being slightly removed from recent rivalries.

In 1961, he began attending the United Nations regularly, and has headed the Jamaican delegation to the General Assembly since independence. When Mr. Sangster became for four short weeks Prime Minister after the February elections, Mr. Shearer was the obvious choice as External Affairs Minister.

In February, when Sir Alexander finally gave up the prime ministership, he handed on to Mr. Shearer his own electoral constituency as well as effective leadership of the BITU. Mr. Shearer thus has a broad base of personal power.

Obvious dangers

There are obvious dangers here. His long and close association with the old chief must bequeath him some enemies, particularly among the National Workers Union which is allied to Norman Manley's Peoples National Party. The NWU is strong in the bauxite industry, where great expansion is planned.

But the dangers must be outweighed by his intimate knowledge of Jamaican agriculture. Both parties fought the election on the need for land reform, to end subsistence farming on tiny hillside holdings. How to do this during the comparatively short time that stepped-up tapping of bauxite deposits gives Jamaica extra cash for drastic changes is a major problem facing the new leader.

This knowledge, allied to his experience in foreign affairs, is a gift to a Government now having to tackle several difficult negotiations. A crucial question for Jamaica is whether it can help persuade the main consumer countries to make a more favorable International Sugar Agreement this year. Only the special quota and price offered Commonwealth Caribbean sugar by Britain has kept this basic Jamaican industry out of the red in recent years.

Again, the question of whether Jamaica follows Trinidad and applies to join the Organization of American States is one Mr. Shearer must have been studying for some time. Guiding these policies should not be difficult, for he has already felt the reins.

Some have suggested the appointment of Jamaica's first Negro Prime Minister (Mr. Sangster is Creole, and

Sir Alexander added claims of Spanish ancestry) could release pent-up anti-white feelings. The reverse is more likely: those who have recently become more racially conscious will be pleased the country has a darker-skinned leader. Mr. Shearer himself has the reputation of a moderate, and would hardly want to fan emotions. His years as member for Western Kingston gives him another advantage if the grumbling violence there of the past year erupts.

A heavy loss

The loss of Donald Sangster, with his quiet competence and financial expertness, is a heavy one for Jamaica at a critical time. But other Cabinet ministers, who may be disappointed that they were passed over in the succession, will admit the new Prime Minister has the broadest qualifications for the post. With some luck, in commodity prices and other international negotiations, Jamaica under Mr. Shearer could be entering an exciting period of development and growth.

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